

## EDUCATION

# Schools 'will have to cut their budgets by £3bn'

By Richard Vaughan  
EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

Schools will be forced to make around £3bn worth of cuts to their budgets by 2020 due to growing cost pressures, the Government's spending watchdog has warned.

This is despite the National Audit Office (NAO) revealing that more than 60 per cent of secondary schools are already spending more than their income because of increasingly squeezed budgets.

The findings come as ministers are expected to unveil controversial plans this week that will funnel cash away from schools in London and other major cities, to more rural

areas. According to the NAO, 61 per cent of secondaries overspent their budgets in 2014-15, up from 38.8 per cent of schools in 2012-13.

The figures led Meg Hillier, chair of the Public Accounts Committee, to warn that the Department for Education (DfE) needed to "get their act together". "There are worrying signs that schools are under growing financial pressure, with many now spending more than their annual income," she said.

"At the same time, the sector is being asked to make £3bn in savings by 2019-20; and the government department supposed to support them to become more efficient have instead focused on structural reform.

## Exams 'Cheating teachers'

The number of teachers caught helping their pupils cheat in GCSE and A-level exams has soared by nearly 50 per cent, new figures have shown.

According to data released by Ofqual, the exams regulator, the number of teachers and other school staff penalised for "exam malpractice" **leapt by 48 per cent** on last year.

The watchdog revealed that more than half – 56 per cent – of penalties dished out were for staff members giving students "inappropriate assistance" either in the exam hall itself or during coursework.

It is all sounding like too familiar a story. The details were contained in a damning report published by the NAO today, which said the DfE was not doing enough to prepare schools for the additional "efficiency savings" that will need to be made by 2019-20.

The report states that a combination of cost pressures, including higher employer contributions to national insurance and the teacher pension scheme, has meant schools are expected to find savings of £1.3bn in procurement and £1.7bn in "using their staff more efficiently".

But the watchdog warns that the DfE has not "clearly communicated to schools the scale and pace of the

savings required". A DfE spokesman said: "We recognise the increasing cost pressures schools are facing and will continue to provide advice and support to help them use their funding in cost effective ways, and improve the way they buy goods and services, so they get the best possible value for their pupils."

**i** The schools budget was increased by 7.7 per cent in 2015, but the new funding did not take into account the rise in pupil numbers, meaning **schools will see a real-terms cut in funds** once inflation is taken into account.

## BREXIT

# PM 'has moral duty' to reassure EU nationals

By Nigel Morris  
POLITICAL EDITOR

Theresa May is under a "heavy moral obligation" to reassure European Union nationals that they will not be forced to leave Britain at the time of Brexit, according to a Lords report.

Peers urged the Government to provide a "unilateral undertaking" that their citizenship rights will be safeguarded when Britain quits the EU. "The overwhelming weight of the evidence received points to this

as morally the right thing to do," a Lords committee concluded.

It highlighted the "deep anxiety" faced by the millions of EU nationals over their future since June's referendum result.

Downing Street has said Mrs May wants to protect their status, but could not if the rights of British nationals living in EU states were not protected in return.

But the report concluded that even if she "regrettably" refused to give a unilateral undertaking ahead of the Brexit talks, separate negotiations should be conducted over the position of EU nationals living in Britain.

The former Tory minister, Anna Soubry, claimed yesterday that a transitional period taking Britain out of the EU could "go on for years".

Ms Soubry said a transition period after 2019 in which Britain could negotiate details of its new status and adjust smoothly to Brexit should be "as long as business needs".

Her comments came after the Chancellor, Philip Hammond, appeared to challenge Leave-supporting fellow ministers, some of whom favour a "hard Brexit", by saying that "thoughtful politicians" should be in favour of a transition.

## Labour 'Hard Brexit' fight

Labour would seek to amend the legislation to prevent a "hard Brexit" if the Government loses its Supreme Court challenge and the Prime Minister is forced to get the backing of MPs to trigger Article 50 to leave the European Union, Sir Keir Starmer has said.

Labour's Brexit spokesman (inset) said that there was no consensus among MPs for a hard Brexit and that Labour "will push for a Brexit model which maintains our ability successfully to trade goods and deliver services with and to the European Union."



## Chancellor's Christmas windfall

Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer, making a Christmas decoration with Spike Coates during the Chancellor's annual Christmas party at 11 Downing

Street yesterday. The party was with the charity Starlight, which works for seriously ill children. There were 45 children at the party. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

## CRIME

# 'Weaker' checks in Irish Republic letting international criminals into UK

By David Young

Weaker immigration checks in the Irish Republic are providing a route for international criminals to enter the UK, Northern Ireland's police chief has told MPs.

George Hamilton said controls in the Republic of Ireland did not have the same "resource or focus" as those operating in Northern Ireland.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) chief constable was being questioned by members of a Westminster committee as part of its inquiry into the future of the Irish border post-Brexit.

Mr Hamilton told the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that a growing number of criminals operating on the island of Ireland were from abroad.

That prompted a question from committee chairman Laurence Robertson on how international gangsters were entering the UK and Ireland. "How are these people able to access the countries?"

Mr Hamilton replied: "Access into the Republic of Ireland may not have the resource assigned to it or the immigration checks we would have in Northern Ireland or the UK."

He highlighted that 775 people had been detained at Northern Ireland ports in the last year.

He continued: "I think it would be fair to say that immigration controls into the Republic of Ireland may not have the same resource or

focus that we would see in Northern Ireland."

Mr Hamilton said the PSNI and Irish Garda were "jointly managing" risks around extremism and "radicalised" individuals returning from war-torn countries such as Syria.

**775**

The number of people detained at Northern Ireland ports in the last year